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ABSTRACT

A problem facing many supervisors and administrators in K-12 and higher education is how to effectively integrate technology into the instructional program. Professional development plays a key role in providing training and support required to develop the instructional technology (IT) skills necessary to have a positive effect on instruction. This paper explores the role of supervisors and administrators as instructional leaders in their schools in the formation and support of programs aimed at the integration of instructional technology. An online professional development course for supervisors was developed by the principle of a large urban high school in the northeast, using Blackboard as the vehicle for the course's implementation. The goal of the course was to provide turnkey training for the 10 assistant principals at the school. In addition to providing some essential IT skills for the supervisors and administrators, the online course aimed to begin to cultivate a community of learners within the school. (Contains 16 references.) (Author)

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Developing an Online Professional Development Program Using Instructional Technology For Supervisors and Administrators

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Abstract: A problem facing many supervisors and administrators in K-12 and higher education is how to effectively integrate technology into the instructional program. Professional development plays a key role in providing training and support required to develop the instructional technology (IT) skills necessary to have a positive effect on instruction. This paper will explore the role of supervisors and administrators as instructional leaders in their schools in the formation and support of programs aimed at the integration of instructional technology. An online professional development course for supervisors was developed by the principal of a large urban high school in the northeast, using Blackboard as the vehicle for the course's implementation. The goal of the course was to provide turnkey training for the ten assistant principals at the school. In addition to providing some essential IT skills for the supervisors and administrators, the online course aimed to begin to cultivate a community of learners within the school.

Teaching and Learning in the 21st Century

There have been many notable changes in our society as we move forward into the 21st century. Basic philosophical changes in teaching and learning have dominated the educational landscape. According to Schlechty (1997) the way people access, work with and communicate information is fundamentally different than it was a decade ago. Education and teaching are no longer seen as a method of delivery of information. Kavanagh (2001) believes that educators have had to make a radical shift in their approach to teaching and learning, and must focus more on the process by which students learn. A true educator is no longer viewed as the center of attention and does not merely impart knowledge to the eager-to-learn student. Barth (2001) contends that the "Transmission of Knowledge" model fails to meet the needs of students to be involved and engaged learners. In the effective classroom, the true educator serves more as a coach and facilitator who draws forth learning from within the student.

Schlechty (1997) stresses that in order to shift attention from teacher to learner, teachers must plan lessons that are more interactive and more student-centered. This shift in attention toward the student also requires a more learner-centered approach to curriculum writing and revision.

The Role of Technology in Teaching and Learning

In the past two and a half decades, technology has become an integral part of classroom instruction. This technology has been computer based. Only ten years ago, there was approximately 1 computer for every 30 students in the United States. In 2000, that figure dropped to 1 computer for every 4.9 students (Education Week, 2001). Educators across this country and around the world have recognized that computers have a genuine place in the

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education of our children. As Lemke and Coughlin (1998) point out, technology accelerates, enriches and deepens basic skills; it motivates and engages students in learning.

In recent years, as the computer has found its way into more classrooms, a myriad of uses has developed. While early classroom use was relegated to BASIC programming, today's uses include traditional computer applications such as word processing, database management, use of spreadsheets, presentation software, and computer graphics, as well as more advanced programming, web design, and other web-based applications such as online research and e-mail.

As computers and access to the Internet become more widespread in schools and homes of students and teachers, technology has become a tool that is quickly changing the way teachers teach and the way in which students learn. According to Fisher and Dove (1998) we are clearly in a period of transformation. To move forward will require leadership, vision and a willingness to take risks and to make mistakes for the opportunity of improving instruction and increasing learning in our students. As Schmeltzer (2001) notes, administrators can no longer avoid providing the same leadership in technology as they have in the more traditional areas.

Access Issues for Staff and Students

While embarking upon professional development programs to train teachers and administrators in the use of the computer as a technology tool for teaching and learning, we need to understand that there may be access issues for teachers as well as for our students. Do our administrators, teachers and students have computers readily available to them in the schools? What about at home? In addition, how many of these computers have Internet access?

The answer to the access question is that, in general, most teachers have access to a computer. In a recent study by the National Center for Educational Statistics (2000) virtually all (99 percent) public school teachers reported having access to a computer somewhere in their school. In addition, the NCES cited that 82 percent of public school teachers reported that there was a computer available to them at home. However, access to the Internet is much less widespread - only 63 percent of those responding to the NCES study had Internet access.

Having access to a computer, though, does not guarantee its usage in the classroom. According to the NCES study (2000), only half of the teachers who had computers or the Internet available in their schools used them for instructional purposes.

The Role of the Supervisor

To effectively integrate educational technology into the learning environment, Gibson (2000) points out that it is essential for informed and effective leadership to have a visible presence. Serving as the instructional leaders in their buildings, administrators and supervisors must provide the means and professional development necessary to achieve technology infusion and to ensure that computers and the Internet are optimally utilized. In order to do so, it is essential that all administrators and supervisors become technologically competent. As Gillingham and Topper (1999) assert, administrators of teacher prep programs need to learn more about modern forms of communication and IT, and to make them an integral part of their programs.

One of the main frustrations of teachers is that learning computer skills requires an extended amount of time before they reach a comfort level and a level of confidence that will enable them to involve their students (Fisher & Dove, 1998). Imagine the plight of the school administrator or supervisor who needs to become sufficiently computer competent to be an integral part of a professional development program in instructional technology. According to McKenzie (1998) the challenge of integrating technology into the instructional program may be more about attitude and spirit than it is about skill. To move instructional technology to a higher plateau administrators and supervisors must become stakeholders and buy into the use of technology as an administrative and instructional tool. To accomplish this, districts and school principals need to devise innovative ways of delivering ongoing professional development that is both flexible and effective.

Implementation of an Online Course for Supervisors

The Principal of a large, urban high school in the northeast instituted a course of study for administrators using Blackboard as the vehicle. The purpose of the course was to train the ten assistant principals in his school in the use

and implementation of IT in the classroom. The ultimate goal was for the assistant principals to provide turnkey training for teachers in their own departments. The Principal chose to offer an online course for this professional development because it had the greatest chance for optimal participation by those involved. According to Sujo de Montes and Gonzales (2000) courses that are Web-based provide a viable option for professional development of teachers and administrators.

Although the Principal of the school had a background in computer science and IT, the level of computer competence among the assistant principals varied greatly. While one of the assistant principals was a supervisor of business subjects and author of textbooks and workbooks in various computer applications, two others had little or no experience with computers. The other seven assistant principals were at the same level of minimal competence. Most were infrequent users of e-mail with personal accounts at home. All used word processing software to write letters, memos and observation reports. A few even developed some test banks for different courses within their department.

Each of the ten "learners" had access to the Internet at home and each had a computer in his/her office in school. However, only six had Internet access in their office. Therefore, the first order of business in the beginning of the school year was to provide Internet access for the four assistant principals who were without this tool in their office. Once Internet access was available to each of the assistant principals, both at home and in school, the course of study began.

Following the normal routine of a typical school year, regular bi-weekly administrative cabinet meetings took place. The difference for this school year would be that every other cabinet meeting would include one and one half hours of professional development in an Internet accessible computer lab with the Principal serving as trainer and facilitator. According to Holbein and Jackson (1999) teachers and administrators need both time and support to acquire and sustain computer literacy. Given the regular training schedule, the accessibility of Blackboard, and the expertise and support of two colleagues, the course of study had an excellent chance for success.

The Online Course of Study

The focus of the initial meeting for the training course was to familiarize the supervisors with Blackboard. Supervisors completed the data entry of personal information and were given a guided tour of the Web-based tool. Once familiar with navigating Blackboard, supervisors were given assignments at regular intervals over the course of the fall semester to be completed by the following meeting.

The **Announcements** section of Blackboard was used as a method of conveying information to the assistant principals about new assignments and general feedback regarding previous assignments. The **Course Information** and **Staff Information** sections were used for demonstration purposes, showing the assistant principals how a teacher could readily relay information about an online course to his/her students. The **Course Documents** section contained several documents: the course content, course objectives, and a web site evaluation form.

The **Assignments** section listed all of the assignments up to and including the most current assignment. The first assignment required participants to log onto Blackboard, enter the requested personal information, then use the **Communication** section of Blackboard to e-mail the instructor (Principal) that they got to this point in the assignment. Initially, all participants used their personal e-mail addresses in setting up their Blackboard accounts. Since this was the participants' initial encounter with Blackboard, the instructor used a face-to-face meeting to walk them through the assignment, making sure that they were comfortable with the online classroom tool.

The next feature explored by the group was the **Discussion Board** of the **Communication** section. Teaching this skill early in the course enabled the instructor to create a community of interactive learners. As Brown (1997) points out, online discussion has a number of advantages over oral real time discussion. Learners can respond at a time that best suits them, allowing for reflection and further research before responding. Dutt-Doner and Powers (2000) maintain that while a new instructional tool such as electronic discussion groups can have some stumbling blocks, it can have tremendous impact upon discussion and thought. In addition to giving his supervisors this new instructional tool, the Principal was also able to get feedback regarding school related issues, programs and possible changes in certain school policies. The **Discussion Board** served a dual purpose – it allowed for dialogue among the supervisors and administrators, and at the same time, reinforced the use of the **Discussion Board** as a tool for ongoing communication among all participants for the duration of the training course and after completion of the course.

Since all of the participants were familiar with MS Word and had some experience surfing the Web, much of the training and assignments given utilized this common knowledge as part of an overall assignment. Web-based training and assignments included Web surfing, Web site evaluation using a comprehensive form placed in an MS

Word document on Blackboard and downloaded by the participants, a scavenger hunt using various search engines, simple Web page design using Blackboard, and a "googlewhacking" contest in which participants had to find two words that produced a single hit in a Google search. Other training and assignments included saving a graphic to disk, inserting a graphic into an MS Word document, and attaching a document to an e-mail message.

A slight detour in the course took place when the Board of Education for the school instituted a new Web-based e-mail system using Microsoft Outlook Web Access for all supervisors and teachers in the entire school district. Since all the learners were using their own private e-mail, the group agreed that it would be wise to learn the new system for consistency. The training for the new e-mail system was then done through the online course using Blackboard. A simple user's guide was created by the Principal and the Business Department Assistant Principal, and distributed to the participants via Blackboard. A new set of assignments was created for the group that reinforced such common e-mail tasks as reading a message, replying to a message, forwarding a message, and attaching a document to a message. Other features of Outlook Web Access such as creating folders, setting up a directory of contacts, and creating distribution lists were reviewed in the **Course Documents** section using "How to" sheets and reinforced through the **Assignments** section.

Having used an online method of delivery, the assistant principals shifted to the new system of e-mail with relative ease. Personal information on Blackboard was updated, and all further e-mail correspondence used the new system for reinforcement.

By the end of the fall semester, each of the assistant principals demonstrated skills acquired through the regular submission of assignments. By the beginning of the spring semester, nine of the ten assistant principals were using e-mail on a daily basis. For his part, the Principal made it a point to e-mail the assistant principals each day. This served not only as a method of daily communication, it also served as a way of reinforcing e-mailing skills learned in the online course.

As the group moved into the spring semester, the focus shifted to more advanced uses of computer technology. In doing so, more ambitious training and assignments were implemented during the spring semester. These included such activities as creating a PowerPoint presentation, using Inspiration to create semantic maps, downloading and adapting lesson plans, and creating inquiry-based learning projects. A single face-to-face training session took place for each activity. This was followed by a reinforcing assignment, done independently or collaboratively, and submitted online.

Plans for the end of the spring semester revolved around preparations for the assistant principals to turnkey this training with their teachers in the fall 2002 semester using a similar ongoing, online professional development program with Blackboard as the vehicle of delivery. Department supervisors planned to tailor the supervisors' course to meet the needs of the teachers in their particular academic discipline.

Reflections

According to Schmeltzer (2001) creating a community of learners among the administrators of a school or district is crucial to the success of any professional development program. Throughout the year, the online course provided a mechanism for the school supervisors and administrators to share ideas and skills. By creating such a learning circle, great improvements in teaching quality can be realized (Collay, Dunlap, Enloe & Gagnon, 1998).

A course evaluation was conducted at the end of the school year through the discussion board. Each assistant principal was asked to offer his/her evaluation of the course and to respond to at least one of his/her colleague's evaluations. In general, the assistant principals found the online course to be a very worthwhile endeavor. As one computer novice assistant principal remarked, "The projects required me to use the computer to a much greater extent than I had, something that was necessary for me to see its advantages."

During the fall semester most of the assistant principals reached a comfort level with the technology and developed a better sense of community with one another. Through the use of the discussion board, the learners were also able to share reflections and experiences, frustrations and successes. The administrators and supervisors felt strongly that the social element provided by the online course was as important as the technical and instructional components. As one participant noted, "The discussion board and regular use of e-mail enabled us to maintain ongoing communication, something that was lacking in the past."

The use of regular "face-to-face" meetings was deemed important and necessary by the participants. However, since the meetings were scheduled during the school day, some of the administrators and supervisors had occasional distractions that were somewhat disruptive. It was agreed that, in the future, these "face-to-face" meetings be conducted outside the normal school day, thus limiting unforeseen disruptions.

Conclusions

Comprehensive integration of technology into curriculum and into the classroom will require tremendous vision and effort from our school leadership. As Kavanagh (2001) states, the potential of information technology and the Internet to create communities of learners will continue to have a significant effect on the design of educational programs. School administrators and supervisors need to be trained in ongoing professional development programs that maximize their participation, increase their IT skills, and develop a community of learners and instructional leaders within their schools. Collaboration tools such as *Blackboard* can facilitate the "anytime, anywhere" professional development necessary to accomplish this goal. Other such collaboration tools include *LiveText* by LiveText (www.livetext.com), WebCT by WebCT (www.webct.com), *FirstClass* by Centrinity (www.centrinity.com), and *Polycom WebOffice* by Polycom (www.polycom.com). Since budget limitations can be an issue for many schools, similar ongoing collaborative professional development can also be accomplished through the use of e-mail and attachments.

Whatever the method of delivery, a professional development program that provides opportunities for learning, and is independent of time and location, has the greatest chance for ensuring technology integration into the classroom.

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